

The SALT Survey

The goal of the *SALT Survey* in Rhode Island, known nationally as the *High Performance Learning Communities (HiPlaces) Assessment*, is to provide schools with reliable and systematic information for use in planning and monitoring school improvement efforts. Developed by Robert D. Felner, Ph.D. and his colleagues at the National Center on Public Education and Social Policy, the *HiPlaces Assessment/SALT Survey* is an integral part of the school improvement efforts, working with more than 3,100 schools, with 125,000 teachers, 200,000 parents, and 1,300,000 students over the past 2 decades.

The *SALT Survey* helps address several issues affecting schools' ability to gather information/data and use it effectively in planning for the future. These issues include:

- ◆ The limited amounts of time schools have for data gathering and careful reflection.
- ◆ The need of schools for rapid feedback to determine the extent to which their improvement efforts are "on course" and to ensure that improvements continue to gain momentum. The *SALT Survey* is designed to inform schools about the effects of those improvements on their students.
- ◆ The need of staff to use the knowledge gained from the HiPlaces Assessment for both short and long-term school improvement planning. The *SALT Survey* provides a mechanism for making important decisions by raising key questions that lead to deeper engagement of all staff in a school's transformation.

The *SALT Survey* addresses all of these issues. Schools that have used the assessment have gained rich and comprehensive data collected with minimal teacher and student disruptions. Most of the data are gathered through machine scannable forms that can be analyzed and returned to schools relatively quickly. The results from the *SALT Survey* serve as a structure for continued discussion of the improvement process.

Given these general goals, the *SALT Survey* has a few specific objectives. These include:

1. Helping schools to understand the relationship between the implementation of practices that are part of their school improvement plan and student success in their school
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2. Providing schools with specific, reliable data concerning the extent to which the changes, practices, and processes that are targeted in their improvement plan are being implemented at the school, grade, and classroom levels. For example, teachers are asked to indicate how often certain teaching practices (e.g., small group teaching and learning strategies, integration of health concepts into thematic units) are used in the classroom.
3. Providing schools, local and state agencies, and other policy makers with critical information on the value and impact of bringing their school improvement plans to life.

The categories featured in all versions of the *SALT Survey* are designed to assess the current status of the school community and its inhabitants in each of the areas that the research literature has identified as critical to the teaching and learning process. The assessment is also designed to fulfill the goal of effective education for all students. Examples of categories featured in the assessment are: classroom/curriculum practices and routines; cross-teacher and course content and instructional integration; advisory and guidance programs; teacher preparation and staff development needs assessment; governance, decision-making practices and structures; family and community involvement and linkages; and comprehensive health and adolescent development promotion.

What does the SALT Survey look like?

The *SALT Survey* consists of a set of surveys to be answered by principals and other administrators, classroom teachers, students and parents. In addition, as part of the assessment one individual at the school gathers certain archival data. Most of the survey questions are multiple choice. Completing the *SALT Survey* is a simple process: Read the directions for each section and then fill in the appropriate answer. Currently there are five surveys:

The Administrator Survey:

The Administrator Survey takes about two hours to complete and includes a special section on demographics and school structure (e.g., enrollment at each grade level, class sizes) as well as separate School Health and Technology Surveys.

The Assistant/Associate Administrator Survey:

The Assistant/ Associate Administrator Survey is shorter and takes about 45 minutes to complete.

The Staff Survey:

The staff survey takes approximately 75 min. to complete and can be completed either during planning periods or at home.

The Student Survey:

The Student Survey usually takes one 60-minute period to administer. To ensure that reading levels do not influence students' ability to fill out the surveys reliably, it is recommended that teachers read the surveys to their students. The student survey and instructions for teachers reading the survey are available in English and Spanish.

The Parent Survey:

The parent survey is ideally sent to the parents of all students and takes between 10 – 15 minutes to complete. Parents are asked to return the completed survey to the school or send it directly to NCPE. The Parent survey is available in five languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Cambodian and Laotian.

Additionally, there is a **Teacher Student Rating Scale (TSRS) Questionnaire:**

The TSRS requires that a teacher spend about 3-4 minutes rating each student. The number of students rated depends upon the number of students enrolled in each grade being surveyed. It is recommended that the TSRS is completed by core teachers or teachers who are very familiar with the students being rated.

When your assessment is completed, we arrange for your surveys to be returned to NCPE for machine scanning and analysis.

When is the best time to complete the SALT Survey?

The initial phase of the assessment process should optimally take place in the middle of the school year. This time frame reflects two important concerns. First, both teachers and students should have had sufficient time within the academic year to be able to report their experiences and practices at a level that truly represents the current year, rather than the previous ones. Second, a six-week time frame is necessary for data analysis and initial feedback to be returned to the school. The earlier a school schedules the assessment, the sooner it can expect to receive feedback to assist planning and decision-making with data current to that school year. Further, early feedback provides schools the opportunity to request more focused data analyses that can have immediate effects on the current school year. Therefore, schools should identify the dates for the assessment as early as possible, place these dates on the school calendar, and attempt to keep the assessment time frame constant from year to year. Teachers need a small amount of preparation to administer the student surveys. This preparation should

optimally take place several weeks prior to the administration of the surveys so that teachers have time to review the materials and all questions can be answered.

How do we connect knowledge to action?

Once schools return the completed surveys to NCPE, the Center can provide feedback as early as Mid-February through Mid-May (recall the 6 week turnaround). This initial feedback provides schools with an assessment of the current levels of use and attainment of each of the practices under each of the implementation categories assessed.

Teachers and administrators are also given feedback on their perceptions of significant obstacles to implementing their school improvement plan, as well as on school/work climate, classroom climate, cultural pluralism, burnout and stress, job satisfaction, commitment to the school, teacher and administrator role functions, role clarity, and practices/duties.

Feedback of the student results will be provided with information related to students' perceptions of school climate, expectations and aspirations, stresses experienced, and socio-emotional strengths and distress including self-esteem, depression, fear, anxiety, and health behaviors and attitudes (examples include basic health practices such as sleeping, alcohol and tobacco consumption, drug use, exercise, eating patterns, and nutritional/health knowledge).

When schools have been in the project for more than a year, they are also given feedback on the levels of change in each of the categories on the *SALT Survey*.

In the past, upon receiving initial feedback, schools have been able to narrow their concerns or identify new questions highly relevant to their needs and particular contexts. To address these specified needs, schools sometimes request additional analyses of their assessment data. NCPE is always pleased to discuss further analysis with individual schools to address their' needs and aspirations. NCPE has also developed a system for schools to use the assessment information as the basis for strategic planning and decision-making. Schools will receive this assistance at times that are mutually arranged. The goal of the additional training is to give schools the capacity to manage ongoing monitoring and planning that is based on comprehensive, current information.

When schools have been in the project for more than a year, they are also given feedback on the levels of change in each of the categories on the HiPlaces Assessment.

What about Confidentiality?

For purposes of confidentiality, no data from any individual will be identified or shared with anyone. Only aggregate data from individuals will be reported. Data from individual schools is similarly protected unless funding agencies or State or District requirements override these individual school protections.

In Summary

The *SALT Survey* is intended to help schools make sound planning decisions based on reliable, up-to-date information. The *SALT Survey* is not a high stakes evaluation of schools. The assessment process is an opportunity for schools to gauge the status of their efforts so as to make systemic, comprehensive change effective and enduring.

Contact for further information:

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